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THE SISTERS

A TRAGEDY

PRINTED BY
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THE SISTERS

A TRAGEDY

BY

ALGERNON CHARLES SWINBURNE

London

CHATTO & WINDUS, PICCADILLY

1892

TO THE

LADY MARY GORDON

THIS PLAY IS GRATEFULLY INSCRIBED

BY HER AFFECTIONATE NEPHEW

DEDICATION.

BETWEEN the sea-cliffs and the sea there sleeps
  A garden walled about with woodland, fair
As dreams that die or days that memory keeps
  Alive in holier light and lovelier air
  Than clothed them round long since and blessed them there
With less benignant blessing, yet less fast
For seal on spirit and sense, than time has cast
For all time on the dead and deathless past.

II.

Beneath the trellised flowers, the flowers that shine
  And lighten all the lustrous length of way
From terrace up to terrace, bear me sign,
  And keep me record how no word could say
  What perfect pleasure or how pure a day
A child's remembrance or a child's delight
Drank deep in dreams of, or in present sight
Exulted as the sunrise in its might.

III.

The shadowed lawns, the shadowing pines, the ways
That wind and wander through a world of flowers,
The radiant orchard where the glad sun's gaze
Dwells, and makes most of all his happiest hours,
The field that laughs beneath the cliff that towers,
The splendour of the slumber that enthralls
With sunbright peace the world within their walls,
Are symbols yet of years that love recalls.

IV.

But scarce the sovereign symbol of the sea,
That clasps about the loveliest land alive
With loveliness more wonderful, may be
Fit sign to show what radiant dreams survive
Of suns that set not with the years that drive
Like mists before the blast of dawn, but still
Through clouds and gusts of change that chafe and chill
Lift up the light that mocks their wrathful will.

V.

A light unshaken of the wind of time
That laughs upon the thunder and the threat
Of years that thicken and of clouds that climb
To put the stars out that they see not set,
And bid sweet memory's rapturous faith forget.
But not the lightning shafts of change can slay
The life of light that dies not with the day,
The glad live past that cannot pass away.

VI.

The many-coloured joys of dawn and noon
  That lit with love a child's life and a boy's,
And kept a man's in concord and in tune
  With lifelong music of memorial joys
  Where thought held life and dream in equipoise,
Even now make child and boy and man seem one,
And days that dawned beneath the last year's sun
As days that even ere childhood died were done.

VII.

The sun to sport in and the cliffs to scale,
  The sea to clasp and wrestle with, till breath
For rapture more than weariness would fail,
  All-golden gifts of dawn, whose record saith
  That time nor change may turn their life to death
Live not in loving thought alone, though there
The life they live be lovelier than they were
When clothed in present light and actual air.

VIII.

Sun, moon, and stars behold the land and sea
  No less than ever lovely, bright as hope
Could hover, or as happiness can be:
  Fair as of old the lawns to sunward slope,
  The fields to seaward slant and close and ope:
But where of old from strong and sleepless wells
The exulting fountains fed their shapely shells,
Where light once dwelt in water, dust now dwells.

IX.

The springs of earth may slacken, and the sun
Find no more laughing lustre to relume
Where once the sunlight and the spring seemed one;
But not on heart or soul may time or doom
Cast aught of drought or lower with aught of gloom
If past and future, hope and memory, be
Ringed round about with love, fast bound and free,
As all the world is girdled with the sea.

PERSONS REPRESENTED.

SIR FRANCIS DILSTON.

SIR ARTHUR CLAVERING.

FRANK DILSTON, *son to* SIR FRANCIS.

REGINALD CLAVERING, *cousin to* SIR ARTHUR.

ANNE DILSTON } *twin-sisters and coheiresses, formerly ward*
MABEL DILSTON } *of* SIR FRANCIS.

Scene, CLAVERING HALL, NORTHUMBERLAND.

Time, 1816

CHARACTERS IN THE INTERLUDE.

ALVISE VIVARINI, *represented by* REGINALD CLAVERING.

GALASSO GALASSI, ,, ,, FRANK DILSTON.

BEATRICE SIGNORELLI, ,, ,, MABEL DILSTON.

FRANCESCA MARIANI, ,, ,, ANNE DILSTON.



ACT

SCENE I.—*A morning room.*

ANNE *and* MABEL.

ANNE.

April again, and not a word of war.
Last year, and not a year ago, it was
That we sat wondering when good news would come.

MABEL.

And had not heard or learnt in lesson-books
If such a place there was as Waterloo.
And never dreamed that——

ANNE.

Well?

MABEL.

That it would be
So soon for ever such a name for us
As Blenheim or Trafalgar.

ANNE.

No. For us?
We don't remember Blenheim—and we had
No cousin wounded at Trafalgar. Still,
If Redgie had been old enough to serve—

MABEL.

I wish he had chosen the navy.

ANNE.

And come home
Unhurt?

MABEL.

No; I forgot. Of course he might
Have died like Nelson—and gone home with him.

ANNE.

Home? Reginald's not quite so tired of life,
I fancy, though he frets at being kept in,
As to look up—outside this world—for home.

MABEL.

No.

ANNE.

Will you tell me—but you will not—me,
Even——

MABEL.

What? Anything I can I will.

ANNE.

Perhaps you cannot—what he said to you
Yesterday?

MABEL.

When?

ANNE.

You will not now, I know.

MABEL.

Where?

ANNE.

When and where? If you must needs be told,
At nine last evening in the library.

MABEL.

Nothing—but what I meant to tell you.

ANNE.

Yes?

You meant to tell me that he said, my dear,
What?

MABEL.

Anne!

ANNE.

You thought I knew?

MABEL.

I thought I must
Have said it without speaking.

ANNE.

Reginald!

And so you really mean to love the boy
You played with, rode with, climbed with, laughed at, made
Your tempter—and your scapegoat—when you chose
To ride forbidden horses, and break bounds
On days forbidden? Love! Of course you like—
And then how can you love him?

MABEL.

Is dislik

Mother of love? Then you—to judge by signs—
Must love Frank Dilston dearly.

ANNE.

So I might,

If—if I did not hate him.

MABEL.

Then you do.

I'm glad. I always liked him.

ANNE.

What has he

Done, that a woman—or a girl—should like
Him?

MABEL.

Need a man—or boy—do anything
More than be true and bright and kind and brave
And try to make you like him?

ANNE.

That spoils all.

He should not try.

MABEL.

I'll tell him not to try.

Enter REGINALD CLAVERING *and* FRANK DILSTON.

ANNE.

Redgie! You've not been riding?

REGINALD.

Have I, Frank?

FRANK.

You'd have me tell a lie to get you off?

ANNE.

You stupid pair of schoolboys! Really, Frank,
You should not let him.

FRANK.

I can't lick him, Anne;
We two—or you alone—might manage.

ANNE.

Why,
The grooms must know he should not mount a horse
Yet.

REGINALD.

Would you have me never ride again
Because last year I got a fall?

ANNE.

Appeal

To Mabel.

REGINALD.

She was always hard on me

MABEL.

Always.

ANNE.

You mean that I encouraged you
To risk your neck when we were girl and boy?
Make him sit down, Frank.

REGINALD.

There. And now we'll talk
Of something—not of nothing.

ANNE.

Of your play?

REGINALD.

That's ready. How about your stage?

ANNE.

But is it

Indeed?

REGINALD.

It's just one little act, you know—
Enough for four and not too much, I hope,
To get by heart in half a pair of days.

ANNE.

In one day? No: I am slow at learning verse—
Even if my part were shorter than the rest.

REGINALD.

It is.

ANNE.

Ah! Thank you.

FRANK.

Mabel's I have read.
It's longer.

MABEL.

As the whole affair is short,
It cannot be much longer. You should rest,
Redgie. Come out and feed the pheasants, Anne.

[*Exeunt* ANNE *and* MABEL.

REGINALD.

How like old times it is, when we came back
From Eton! You remember, Frank, we played
—What was it?—once.

FRANK.

'What was it?' There's no such play.
There's 'What you will': perhaps we played
'Twelfth Night'
In frocks and jackets. Might we now not play
'Love's Labour's Lost'?

REGINALD.

'A Midsummer Night's Dream':
I know, because I played Lysander—you
Demetrius.

FRANK.

How the female parts were cast
You don't remember?

REGINALD.

Helena was Anne,
I think, and Hermia Mabel.

FRANK.

Change the names,

REGINALD.

Ah, yes. All friends from more than twelve miles
round
Came in to our Yuletide gathering through the snows.
How quick and bright Anne's acting was! you two
Bore off the palms all round: Mabel and I
Were somewhere short of nowhere.

FRANK.

Will you now
Retaliate? She and you were plotting this,
Must we suppose, last evening?

REGINALD.

She and I,
Frank? We should make but poor conspirators.

FRANK.

I hope so, and I think so. Seriously,
May not I ask——?

REGINALD.

If she and I are friends?
Surely a man may ask and answer that,
If—as you do—he knows it. If you mean
More—I would hardly tell a brother this,

Who had not been so close a friend of mine
Always, and had no right to ask me this—
No.

FRANK.

Then she does not think—she has no cause—
She cannot think you love her?

REGINALD.

Can I tell?
But this I can tell—she shall never come
To think or dream I do, and vex herself,
By any base and foolish fault of mine.

FRANK.

But if she loves you, Redgie?

REGINALD.

No, my boy.
She does not. Come, we need not talk of that.
I think mock-modesty a mincing lie—
The dirtiest form of self-conceit that is,
Quite, and in either sense the vainest. You
She may not love just yet—but me, I know,
She never will. I ought to say 'Thank God,'
Being poor, and knowing myself unworthy her
—A younger son's son, with a closed career

Should peace prove now as stable as it looks—
If I on my side loved her as I should
And if I knew she would be as I fear—
No, hope she will, happier with you than me.
I can't do that, quite; if I could, and did,
I should be just a little less unfit
To dream that she could love me—which I do.

FRANK.

You don't mean that you want me—

REGINALD.

I do mean.
I want her to be happy: as for you,
If I don't want you to be miserable
It only shows I am not quite a cur.

FRANK.

You never were: but if you meant me well,
What made you go campaigning and come back
A hero?

REGINALD.

Six months' service! Don't you be
A fool—or flatterer.

FRANK.

Still, you have (worse luck !)
Such heavy odds—a wound, and Waterloo !

REGINALD.

If I—or you—had lost an eye or arm,
That wouldn't make us Nelsons.

FRANK.

Something like.

REGINALD.

Well, you can do that in the hunting-field.

FRANK.

I wish I had you in the playing-fields
Again.

REGINALD.

We can't just settle it with fists.
But, if you asked me, as of course you don't
And won't, what she and I were talking of
Last evening, I could tell you—and I will.
I asked her if she thought it possible
That two such baby friends and playfellows
As she and Anne had been with you and me
Could, when grown up, be serious lovers.

FRANK.

Well—

Was that not making love to her? And what
Did she say?

REGINALD.

Hardly. No. Certainly not.

FRANK.

And then?

REGINALD.

The bell rang, and we went to dress
For dinner.

FRANK.

What did she say—if she did—
To make you ask her that?

REGINALD.

Something she did—
At least, I thought so—like a fool. And now
We'll talk no more about it. Mind you, Frank,
I didn't—could I possibly?—forget
That just because I love her—more than you
I won't say—she must never dream I do
If I can help it.

FRANK.

Then, in heaven's name, why
Say what you say you did?

REGINALD.

Don't fret yourself.
No harm was meant or done. But if she does
Love you—if you can win her—as I think
(There !)—you're the happiest fellow ever born.

FRANK.

And you're the best, Redgie. By Jove! she ought
To love you, if she knew how you love her.

REGINALD.

And that, please God, she never will. When you
And she are married, if you tell her so,
You'll play the traitor, not to me but her—
Make her unhappy for the minute. Don't.
She would be sorrier than I'm worth, you know,
To think of any sorrow not her own
And given by her unconsciously. She had
Always the sweetest heart a girl could have.
'Sweet heart'! she might have been the first girl bo
Whose lover ever called her by the name.

FRANK.

Redgie, I don't know what to say to you.

REGINALD.

Say nothing. Talk about our play.

FRANK.

Your play!
We are like to play, it seems, without a stage,
Another, and a sadder.

REGINALD.

Don't be sure.
My play is highly tragic. Italy,
Steel, poison, shipwreck——

FRANK.

One you made at school,
Is it? I know what those were.

REGINALD.

Wait and see.

Enter SIR FRANCIS DULSTON.

SIR FRANCIS.

Well, Frank,—how are you, Reginald?—you let
Mabel go out—and unattended?

FRANK.

Come,
Father, you would not have me (think how she
Would hate it!) hang about her like a burr?

SIR FRANCIS.

No—no. But there's a medium, sir, between
Neglect and persecution.

FRANK.

Well, I hope
And think I've hit that medium.

SIR FRANCIS.

Reginald,
If you were Mabel's lover, or in hope
To be her lover, could you slight her so?

REGINALD.

I can't imagine that condition.

SIR FRANCIS.

Then
You youngsters are no more your fathers' sons
Than moles are sons of eagles.

FRANK.

Rats of cats,
Say, father.

SIR FRANCIS.

Eh! was that an epigram?
The point, my boy? Because we worry you?

FRANK.

Because we scuttle where you used to spring,
And nibble when you used to bite. At least,
You say so—or they say so.

SIR FRANCIS.

Heaven forbid!
Tom Jones and Lovelace were not gods of ours.
But if we meant to win and keep a heart
Worth winning and worth keeping, Frank, we knew
We must not seem to slight it. 'Pique and soothe,'
Young Byron bids you—don't stand off and gape—
There may be better means than his, if you
Love as I trust you love her. There's the bell.

[*Exeunt.*

SCENE II.—In the Garden.

FRANK and MABEL.

FRANK.

I may not say what any man may say?

MABEL.

To me? And any man, you think, may say
Foolish and heartless things to me? or is it
Only the heir of Heronshaw who claims
A right undeniable?

FRANK.

Is the taunt
Fair to yourself or me? You do not think——

MABEL.

You have the right to make mock love to me?
I do not.

FRANK.

How have you the right to call
Truth mockery, knowing I love you?

MABEL.

How should I
Know it? If you mistake me now for Anne,
You may mistake her presently for me.

FRANK.

Anne?

MABEL.

If you care for either cousin—much,
It ought, by all I ever heard or read,
To be the one you are always bickering with.

FRANK.

She does not like me.

MABEL.

She does not dislike.

FRANK.

Her liking would not help nor her dislike
Forbid me to be happy. You perhaps—
I can't guess how you can—may think so: she
Cannot. And if I did—worse luck for me!—
What chance should I have? Can you not have seen
—Not once—not ever—how her face and eyes
Change when she looks at Redgie?

MABEL.

What !—Absurd !
You love her, and are mad with jealousy.

FRANK.

Mad if I am, my madness is to love
You. But you must have seen it.

MABEL.

I am not
Jealous.

FRANK.

You need not have an eye to see it.
Her voice might tell you, when she speaks to him.

MABEL.

The tone is just like yours or mine. Of course
We all make much—or something—of him now ;
Since he came back, I mean.

FRANK.

From Waterloo ;
I knew it—an interesting young cousin. Well,
He does deserve his luck, I know ; he did
Always : and you were always good to him.

MABEL.

He always needed somebody, poor boy,
To be so.

FRANK.

Ah, if that were all! Because
His guardian, my good father,—good to me
Always—his cousin, in whose grounds we now
Walk and discuss him—and his schoolmasters,
You think, were apt——

MABEL.

To ill-use him? No; nor yet
Misunderstand him: that I did not mean.
But she who knew him and loved him best is gone—
His aunt and mine—your mother.

FRANK.

Yes: she did
Love him! she must have loved his mother more
Than many sisters love each othe

MABEL.

More
Than I love Anne or Anne loves me? I hope
Not. But when death comes in—and leaves behind
A child for pledge and for memorial, love

Must naturally feel more—I want the word ;
More of a call upon it—not a claim—
A sort of blind and dumb and sweet appeal
Out of the dark, and out of all the light
That burns no more but broods on all the past—
A glowworm on a grave. And you, I know,
Were never jealous : all the house knew that,
And loved you for it as we did.

FRANK.

Ah—as you
Did ! I'd have had you love me more than they,
If it had not been too great and sweet a thing
For me to dream of.

MABEL.

Do not dream at all.
What good can come of dreaming ?

FRANK.

Less than none,
If dreaming, doubt, or fear, should take away
The little comfort, such as it is—God knows,
Not much, though precious—that your kind last words
Gave me. Too kind they were, Mabel. I was,
And am, jealous of Redgie ; more to-night
Than ever : but I will not be.

MABEL.

I am sure

You will not. Why?

FRANK.

Because I know—I am sure,

Mabel—more sure than you can be of me

Or I can of myself—he would not grudge

Nor envy me my happiness if you

Could bring yourself to make me happy.

MABEL.

Why

Should he?

FRANK.

Ask him.

MABEL.

A pretty thing to ask!

But, Frank, it's good, and very good, of you

To say so—if you care for me at all,

And think it possible I could care for him.

FRANK.

I think it more than possible: but he

Does not. You'll have to tell him. Don't let Anne

Hear you.

MABEL.

I would not let her, certainly,
If I were tempted to propose to you.
Do you think that girls—that women do such things?

FRANK.

No: but I do think—think, by heaven! I know—
He will not tell you what a child might see,
That he can love, and does, better than I,
And all his heart is set on you. But Anne
Loves him: you must have seen it.

MABEL.

You love her,
And do not know it, and take me for her, seeing
Her features in my face, and thinking she
Loves Redgie: is not this the truth? Be frank,
Or change your name for one that means a lie—
Iscariot or Napoleon.

FRANK.

God forbid!
I tell you what I am sure of, as I am sure.
I wish I were not.

MABEL.

Sure? How can you be?

FRANK.

Are you not sure? Be honest. Can you say
You doubt he would have told you—what he won't
And can't—had he been heir of Heronshaw
Or Anyshaw? You might have spared that taunt,
Mabel. But can you say it? You never were
A liar, and never can be. Tell him then
The truth he will not tell you.

MABEL.

What if he
Rejects me? This is past a joke.

FRANK.

It is.

MABEL.

I knew you could not love me. Why make love?

FRANK.

I love you; but I see how you love him;
And think you are right. He loves you more than I—
Yes, more than I can—more than most men could
Love even you. You are no mate for me,
I am no mate for you, the song says. Well,
So be it. God send you happiness with him!

He has done more than give you up—give up
All chance of you—he would not take the chance
That honour, as he thought, forbade. Do you
Reward him.

MABEL.

God reward you, Frank! You see
—It's true—I love him.

FRANK.

And he will not speak.
Tell him to-morrow—and come in to-night.

[*Exeunt.*

ACT II.

SCENE I.—*Another part of the grounds.*

Enter SIR ARTHUR CLAVERING *and* REGINALD.

SIR ARTHUR.

I'm glad you love the old place: to have you here—
You and the Dilstons—brings my father's time
Back. I might almost be your father, though;
Yours, or your cousins'—Frank's or Mabel's. Time
Slips on like water.

REGINALD.

Very softly, here;
Less like the Kielder than the Deadwater
Till both make up the Tyne.

SIR ARTHUR.

It wearies you,
Cousin? Make haste then, and grow strong and stout,

And ride away to battle: till you can,
I mean to keep you prisoner, and be proud
I have a guest who struck beside the Duke
An English stroke at Waterloo.

REGINALD.

Beside,
Arthur? There's no one born can boast of that.
The best we can—the very best of us—
Say for each other, is just, we followed him—
His hand and eye and word and thought—and did
What might be of our duty.

SIR ARTHUR.

Well, my boy,
Did he do more? You're just a hothead still—
The very schoolboy that I knew you first—
On fire with admiration and with love
Of some one or of something, always. Now,
Who is it—besides your general? who—or which?
Anne's chestnut shell, or Mabel's golden fire—
Her emerald eyes, or Anne's dark violets—eh?
You have them both (a happy hero you!)
Dancing attendance on your highness. Here
Comes Mabel: have you not a glove to throw?

Enter MABEL.

Dear cousin, make him talk to you; to me
He will not; and I have not time to dance
Attendance on him. [*Exit.*

REGINALD.

Arthur's jokes are not
Diamonds for brilliance: but he's good.

MABEL.

Are you?

REGINALD.

You never asked me that of old times.

MABEL.

No:
That was superfluous: all the household knew
How good a boy you were.

REGINALD.

And you? A girl
There was who loved the saddle as well as I,
And was not slower at breaking bounds.

MABEL.

You have not
Forgiven me what you suffered for my sake
So often—much too often.

REGINALD.

No, of course.
How should I?

MABEL.

You remember our old rides—
Tell me about your ride at Waterloo.

REGINALD.

More like a swim against a charging sea
It was, than like a race across the moors
Yonder.

MABEL.

But when a breaker got you down—
When you lay hurt it might have been to death—
Will you not tell me what you thought of then?

REGINALD.

No.

MABEL.

Nothing?

REGINALD.

Nothing I can tell you of.

MABEL.

Was all a mist and whirlwind—like the shore
Out yonder when the north-east wind is high?
That I can fancy. But when sense came back
You thought of nothing you can tell me of,
Reginald? nothing?

REGINALD.

Nothing I can tell
Any one—least of all, women or men,
Frank's wife that is to be, Mabel.

MABEL.

And where
Has Frank concealed her from all eyes but your
You are too sharp-sighted, Redgie.

REGINALD.

Did she no
Ask me just now what if she knew—she must
Have known the answer that I could not make—
It was not right or kind to ask?

MABEL.

Not she.

REGINALD.

Mabel!

MABEL.

She's innocent, at least.

REGINALD.

You mean—?

MABEL.

I mean she is not here. Nor anywhere
But in the silliest dreamiest brain alive—
The blindest head cheating the trustiest heart
That ever made a man—untrustworthy.
You did not dream or think of any old friend—
Anne, Frank, or me—when you were lying, cut down
Helpless, that hideous summer night? And now
You will not speak or stir? O, Reginald,
Must I say everything—and more—and you
Nothing?

REGINALD.

My love! Mabel! What can I?

MABEL.

Just that again.

REGINALD.

How can it be?

MABEL.

My love.

How could it not be?

REGINALD.

How have I deserved

This?

MABEL.

How can I tell you? Do you tell me

Now, what you would not tell Frank's wife.

REGINALD.

You know

I need not tell you.

MABEL.

Tell me, though.

REGINALD.

I thought,

Between the shoots and swoonings, off and on,
How hard it was, if anything was hard
When one was dying for England, not to see
Mabel, when I could see the stars. I thought

How sweet it was to know they shone on her
Asleep or waking, here at home. I thought
I could have wished, and should not wish, to send
My whole heart's love back as my life went out,
To find her here and clasp her close and say
What I could never—how much I had loved her.
Then
I thought how base and bad a fool I was
To dream of wishing what would grieve her. Then
I think I fell asleep.

MABEL.

And that was all,
Redgie?

REGINALD.

And that was all, Mabel.

MABEL.

You did—
You did not think, if she had known—if she,
Asleep and dreaming here, had dreamed of it—
What love she would have sent you back for yours—
Yours—how could she be worth it? Did you not
See, as you lay—know, as your pain sank down
And died and left you yet not quite asleep—
How past all words she loved you? Reginald!
You did not?

REGINALD.

How should I have dreamed of heaven?
I'm not a saint, Mabel.

MABEL.

And what am I,
Who ask a man what, being the man he is,
He will not ask me—and am not ashamed?

REGINALD.

You are more than ever a man whom heaven loved best
Saw shining out of heaven in dreams—more dear,
More wonderful than angels. How you can
Care for me really and truly—care for me,
It beats my wits to guess.

MABEL.

It's very strange,
Of course: what is there in you to be loved?

REGINALD.

There's many a true word said in jest. But you!
Why, all the world might fall down at your feet
And you not find a man in all the world
Worth reaching out your hand to raise. And I!

The best luck never finds the best man out,
They say; but no man living could deserve
This.

MABEL.

Well, you always were the best to me;
The brightest, bravest, kindest boy you were
That ever let a girl misuse him—make
His loving sense of honour, courage, faith,
Devotion, rods to whip him—literally,
You know—and never by one word or look
Protested. You were born a hero, sir.
Deny it, and tell a louder lie than when
You used to take my faults upon you. How
I loved you then, and always! Now, at last,
You see, you make me tell it: which is not
As kind as might be, or as then you were.

REGINALD.

I never was or could be fit for you
To glance on or to tread on. You, whose face
Was always all the light of all the world
To me—the sun of suns, the flower of flowers,
The wonder of all wonders—and your smile
The light that lit the dawn up, and your voice
A charm that might have thrilled and stilled the sea—
You, to put out that heavenly hand of yours

And lift up me to heaven above all stars
But those God gave you for your eyes on earth
That all might know his angel!

MABEL.

There—be still.

Enter FRANK (*at a distance*).

Here comes our bridesman—and our matchmaker
He told me that he loved me yesterday,
But that you loved me better—more than he,
And, Redgie, that you would not tell me so
Till I had made an offer for your hand.
A prophet, was he not?

REGINALD.

Did he say that?
I'd like to black his boots.

MABEL.

You weren't his fag,
Were you?—Well, Frank, you told me yesterday
Nothing but truth: and this has come of it.

FRANK.

Your hand in Redgie's? All goes right, then?

MABEL.

All.

I did not give him, I confess, a chance.

REGINALD.

Frank, I can't look you in the face—and yet
I hope and think I have not played you false.

FRANK.

Well, if you swore you had, Redgie my boy,
I'd not believe you. You play false, indeed!
To look me in the face and tell me that
Would need more brass than nature gave your brows

REGINALD.

But how to look your father in the face—
Upon my honour! You must help me, Frank.

FRANK.

And that I will, Redgie. But don't you dream
He'll think there's any need of any help,
Excuse, or pretext for you. Any fool
Must have foreseen it.

MABEL.

Yes—I think he must.
Any but one, at least—who would not see.
Frank, I proposed to him—I did. He is
So scandalously stupid!

FRANK.

Ah, you know,
I told you. That was unavoidable.

REGINALD.

You sons and daughters of good luck and wealth
Make no allowance—cannot, I suppose—
For such poor devils as poor relations. Frank,
I think I see you—in my place, I mean—
Making the least love in the world to her—
Letting her dream you loved her l

FRANK.

Well, did you?

MABEL.

He did.

REGINALD.

don't know how I did.

MABEL.

But I
Know.

FRANK.

I can guess. He never dropped a word
Nor looked a look to say it—and so you knew.

MABEL.

Yes ; that was it.

FRANK.

When I go courting, then,
I'll take a leaf out of old Redgie's book,
And never risk a whisper—never be
Decently civil. Well, it's good to see
How happy you two are.

MABEL.

Hush! Here comes Anne.

Enter ANNE.

ANNE.

I heard what Frank said. And I hope you are
Happy, and always will be.

REGINALD.

Thanks. And yet
I know I ought not.

ANNE.

Complimentary, that,
To Mabel.

REGINALD.

Mabel understands.

ANNE.

Of course.
She always understood you.

REGINALD.

Did she? No:
She always made too much of me—and now
Much more too much than ever. God knows w

ANNE.

God knows what happiness I wish you both.

REGINALD.

Thank her, Mabel.

MABEL.

I can't. She frightens me.
Anne !

ANNE.

Am I grown frightful to all of you ?
Are you afraid of me, Reginald ?

REGINALD.

What
Can ail you, Mabel ? What can frighten you?

ANNE.

Excitement—passionate happiness—I see.
Enough to make a girl—before men's eyes—
Shrink almost from her sister.

MABEL.

Anne, you knew
This was to be—if Redgie pleased.

ANNE.

I did ;
And did not doubt it would be.

FRANK.

These are strange
Congratulations. Anne, you must have thought
It would not.

ANNE.

What I thought or did not think
I know perhaps as well as you. And now
I need not surely twice congratulate
My sister and my brother—soon to be.

MABEL.

Let us go in.

ANNE.

You seem so happy too
That we must all congratulate you, Frank.

[*Exeunt.*

ACT III.

SCENE I.—*In the Garden.*

ANNE *and* MABEL.

ANNE.

This heartsease bed is richer than it was
Last year—and so it should be; should it not?
For your sake and for his, I mean. See here;
Here's one all black—a burning cloud of black,
With golden sunrise at its heart; and here's
One all pure gold from shapely leaf to leaf,
And just its core or centre black as night.

MABEL.

They call them pansies too, you know.

ANNE.

But you
Must call them heartsease now. Tell me—what thoughts
Have lovers that the lovely plain old name
Would not suit better than all others?

MABEL.

None.
None that I know of—nor does Redgie. Anne,
How can we two thank God enough?

ANNE.

I'm sure
I cannot tell you, Mabel. All your thoughts
Are flowers, you say, and flowers as sweet as these
Whose perfume makes the rose's coarse and dull;
And how then could I tell you how to thank
God? He has given you something—thought or truth,
If truth and thought are not the same—which I
Cannot, you know, imagine.

MABEL.

Ah, you will
Some day, and soon—you must and will.

ANNE.

I doubt
That. Can the world supply me, do you think,
With such another Redgie?

MABEL.

That's not fair.

ANNE.

I must put up with something secondrate?
Frank, for example—if he'd have me? No,
Dear Mabel: be content with happiness;
And do not dream it gives you power to play
Providence, or a prophet. Is he not
Waiting for you—there, by the hawthorns—there—
And, certainly, not wanting me?

MABEL.

He is!
I told him not to come and wait for me. [*Exit.*

ANNE.

I cannot bear it: and I cannot die.

Enter SIR ARTHUR.

SIR ARTHUR.

Our lovers are not here? Ah, no; they want
Seclusion—shade and space between the trees
To chirp and twitter. Well, no wonder.

ANNE.

No.

SIR ARTHUR.

The handsomest and happiest pair they are
That England or Northumberland could show,
Are they not?

ANNE.

Yes; Mabel is beautiful.

SIR ARTHUR.

You don't think much of Redgie, then?

ANNE.

He looks,
With all that light soft shining curly hair,
Too boyish for his years and trade: but men
Don't live or die by their good looks or bad.

SIR ARTHUR.

You don't call soldiership a trade? And then,
His years are not so many—not half mine,
And I'm not quite a greybeard.

ANNE.

Let him be
Apollo—Apollino if you like,
Your all but girl-faced godling in the hall.
He did not win her with his face or curls.

SIR ARTHUR.

I am proud to know he did not. Are not you?

ANNE.

Proud of him? Why should I be?

SIR ARTHUR.

No; of her.

ANNE.

O! Yes, of course—very. Not every girl,
Of course, would condescend—to look so high.

SIR ARTHUR.

A fine young loyal fellow, kind and brave,
Wants no more gilding, does he?

ANNE.

Luckily,
We see, he does not. Here she comes alone,
She has sent him in to rest—or speak to Frank.

Re-enter MABEL.

You have not kept him hanging round you long.
You are not exacting, Mabel.

MABEL.

Need I be?

ANNE.

We see you need not.

SIR ARTHUR.

Mabel, may I say
How very and truly glad I am?

MABEL.

You may
Indeed, and let me thank you. That you must.

SIR ARTHUR.

It makes one laugh, or smile at least, to think
That Master Redgie always was till now
The unlucky boy—the type of luckless youth,
Poor fellow—and now it seems you are going to give
Or rather have given him more than his deserts
Or most men's, if not any man's. I am
Glad.

MABEL.

Please don't compliment. You know I have known
Reginald all my life—and can't but know
How much more he deserves than I can give.

ANNE.

She has the courage of her faith, you see.

MABEL.

Don't play at satire, Annie, when you know
How true it is.

ANNE.

Of course I know it, Mab.
He always was incomparable. At school
His masters always said so, and at home—
Ah, well, perhaps the grooms did.

MABEL.

One would think
You did not know him, and hated him. I wish
Almost he did not—as he does—deserve
Far more than I shall bring.

SIR ARTHUR.

Impossible
Even if he were—no subaltern, but even
The Duke himself.

Enter FRANK *and* REGINALD.

FRANK.

Who's talking of the Duke?
Ask Redgie what he thinks of him.

REGINALD.

No, don't.

My name's not Homer.

ANNE.

Frenchmen say——

REGINALD.

Dear Anne,

Don't you say 'Frenchmen say'—say 'Frenchmen lie.'
They call the man who thrashes them a cur;
Then what must they be?

SIR ARTHUR.

Try to tell us, though,
Something—if only to confute the frogs
And shame their craven croaking.

REGINALD.

What on earth
Can I—or any man—could Wordsworth, even—
Say that all England has not said of him
A thousand times, and will not say again
Ten thousand?

SIR ARTHUR.

Come, my boy, you're privileged,
You know; you have served, and seen him.

REGINALD.

Seen him? Yes.
You see the sun each morning; but the sun
Takes no particular notice and displays
No special aspect just for your behoof,
Does it?

MABEL.

He never spoke to you?

REGINALD.

To me?

MABEL.

Why not?

REGINALD.

He might of course to any one;
But I'm not lucky—never was, you know.

ANNE.

They say that none of you who have followed him
Love him as Frenchmen love Napoleon.

REGINALD.

No.
How should they? No one loves the sun as much
As drunken fools love wildfires when they go

Plunging through marsh and mire and quag and
haugh
To find a filthy grave.

SIR ARTHUR.

Come, come, my boy!
Remember—'love your enemies.'

REGINALD.

When I have
Any, I'll try; but not my country's; not
Traitors and liars and thieves and murderers—no,—
Heroes of French or Irish fashion. Think
How fast the Duke stands always—how there's not
A fellow—can't be—drudging in the rear
Who does not know as well as that the sun
Shines, that the man ahead of all of us
Is fit to lead or send us anywhere
And sure to keep quick time with us, if we
Want or if duty wants him—bids the chief
Keep pace with you or me. And then just think,
Could he, suppose he had been—impossibly—
Beaten and burnt out of the country, lashed,
Lashed like a hound and hunted like a hare
Back to his form or kennel through the snow,
Have left his men dropping like flies, devoured

By winter as if by fire, starved, frozen, blind,
Maimed, mad with torment, dying in hell, while he
Scurried and scuttled off in comfort?

MABEL.

No.
He could not. Arthur quite agrees. And now
Be quiet.

SIR ARTHUR.

Redgie takes away one's breath.
But that's the trick to catch young ladies' hearts—
Enthusiasm on the now successful side.

MABEL.

Successful! If we could have failed, you know,
He would have been—he, I, and you and all,
All of us, all, more passionate and keen
And hotter in our faith and loyalty
And bitterer in our love and hate than now
When thoughts of England and her work are not
Tempered with tears that are not born of pride
And joy that pride makes perfect.

FRANK.

Let's be cool.
I have not seen you quite so hot and red
Since you were flogged for bathing at the Weir,
Redgie.

REGINALD.

Which time? the twentieth?

FRANK.

That at least.

MABEL.

Poor fellow!

REGINALD.

Ah, you always pitied me—
And spoilt me.

MABEL.

No one else did, Reginald.

REGINALD.

And right and wise they were—a worthless whelp!

MABEL.

Very. Not worth a thought—were you?

REGINALD.

I'm sure
Not worth a tear of yours—and yet you cried
Sometimes, you know, for my mischances.

SIR ARTHUR.

Ay?

So, boy and girl were born for bride and groom,
Were they? There's nothing now to cry for then.

ANNE.

Arthur forgets: are love and happiness
Nothing to cry for? Tears, we are told, are signs
Infallible—indispensable—of joy.

FRANK.

Mabel and Redgie, then, must be just now
Unhappy—very unhappy. Can they fill
With us their parts to-morrow in his play?

MABEL.

Yes: I know mine; and Anne knows hers.

ANNE.

And Frank
His. Does he stab you, Redgie, on the stage?

REGINALD.

Yes, as I save him from the shipwreck

SIR ARTHUR.

Good!
That's something like a villain!

ANNE.

I'm as bad.
I poison Mabel—out of love for Frank.

SIR ARTHUR.

Heaven help us, what a tragic day or night!
It's well the drawing-room and the libraries
Are all rigged up ship-shape, with stage and box
Ready, and no such audience to be feared
As might—I don't say would, though, Reginald—
Hiss you from pit and gallery.

REGINALD.

That they would!
It's all a theft from Dodsley's great old plays,
I know you'll say—thirdrate and secondhand.
The book, you know, you lent me when a boy—
Or else I borrowed and you did not lend.

SIR ARTHUR.

That's possible, you bad young scamp. I wish
We could have seen it played in the open air,

Boccaccio-like,—but that would scarcely suit
With April in Northumberland.

ANNE.

Not quite.

REGINALD.

Come, don't abuse our climate and revile
The crowning county of England—yes, the best
It must be.

FRANK.

Now he's off again.

REGINALD.

I'm not.
But I just ask you where you'll find its like?
Have you and I, then, raced across its moors
Till horse and boy were wellnigh mad with glee
So often, summer and winter, home from school,
And not found that out? Take the streams away,
The country would be sweeter than the south
Anywhere: give the south our streams, would it
Be fit to match our borders? Flower and crag,
Burnside and boulder, heather and whin—you don't
Dream you can match them south of this? And then,
If all the unwatered country were as flat
As the Eton playing-fields, give it back our burns,

And set them singing through a sad south world,
And try to make them dismal as its fens—
They won't be! Bright and tawny, full of fun
And storm and sunlight, taking change and chance
With laugh on laugh of triumph—why, you know
How they plunge, pause, chafe, chide across the rocks
And chuckle along the rapids, till they breathe
And rest and pant and build some bright deep bath
For happy boys to dive in, and swim up,
And match the water's laughter.

SIR ARTHUR.

You at least
Know it, we doubt not. Woodlands too we have,
Have we not, Mabel? beech, oak, aspen, pine,
And Redgie's old familiar friend, the birch,
With all its blithe lithe bounty of buds and sprays
For hapless boys to wince at, and grow red,
And feel a tingling memory prick their skins—
Sting till their burning blood seems all one blush—
Eh?

REGINALD.

I beg pardon if I bored you. But—
You know there's nothing like this country. Frank,
Is there?

FRANK.

I never will dispute with you
Anything, Redgie. This is what you call
Being peaceable, is it? firing up like tow
And rattling off like small-shot?

REGINALD.

I can't help—
Can I?

FRANK.

When you said that at school, my lad,
It didn't help you much.

MABEL.

Don't bully him so.
Don't let them, Redgie.

SIR ARTHUR.

Redgie must be proof
Now against jokes that used to make the boy
Frown, blush, and wince: and well he may be.

ANNE.

Why?
Is Reginald much wiser than he was?
He seems to me the same boy still.

SIR ARTHUR.

He is,
I think; but now the luckiest living.

REGINALD.

Yes.
I'm half afraid one ought not anyhow
To be so happy. None of you, I know,
Our brothers and our sister, think it right.
You cannot. Nor do I.

SIR ARTHUR.

A willow-wreath
For Mabel! Redgie turns her off.

MABEL.

He might,
If she would let him: but he'll find her grasp
Tenacious as a viper's. Be resigned.
Redgie: I shall not let you go.

REGINALD.

I am
Resigned. But if God bade one rise to heaven
At once, and sit above the happiest there,

Resigned one might be—possibly: but still
Would not one shrink for shame's sake? Look at her
And me!

SIR ARTHUR.

I never saw a better match.

MABEL.

I never had so sweet a compliment
Paid me. I shan't forget it, Arthur.

REGINALD.

What
Possesses all of you to try and turn
The poor amount of head I have, I can't
Imagine. One might think you had laid a bet
To make a man shed tears by way of thanks
And laugh at him for crying. Frank,—Arthur,—Anne,
You know I know how good it is of you
To wish me joy—and how I thank you: that
You must know.

ANNE.

Surely, Reginald, we do.
Goodwill like ours could hardly miss, I trust
Of gratitude like yours.

MABEL.

What is it, Anne?
What makes you smile so?

ANNE.

Would you have me frown?

MABEL.

Rather than smile like that; you would not look
So enigmatic.

ANNE.

Let it pass, my dear:
We shall not smile to-morrow, when we play
Tragedy—shall we? Are the properties
Ready—stiletto and poison-flask?

REGINALD.

Ah, there
We are lucky. There's the old laboratory, made
It seems for our stage purpose, where you know
Sir Edward kept his chemicals and things—
Collections of the uncanniest odds and ends,
Poisons and weapons from all parts of the earth,
Which Arthur lets us choose from.

ANNE.

Are they safe
To play with?

MABEL.

Are we children, Annie? Still
Perhaps you are right: we had better let them be.

SIR ARTHUR.

The daggers are not dangerous—blunt as lead—
That I shall let you youngsters play with.

REGINALD.

Good:
But how about the poison? let us have
A genuine old Venetian flask to fill
With wine and water.

ANNE.

Let me choose it.

MABEL.

You?
Why?

ANNE.

I know more about such things.

MABEL.

About

Poison?

ANNE.

About the loveliest oldworld ware
Fonthill or Strawberry Hill could furnish: I'm
Miss Beckford, or Horatia Walpole.

SIR ARTHUR.

Come
And take your choice of the empty flasks. Don't choose
A full one by mistake.

ANNE.

I promise not.

[*Exeunt* SIR ARTHUR, *and* ANNE.

FRANK

I leave you to consult together, then—
The playwright and his heroine: that's but fair.

[*Exit.*

MABEL.

I don't quite like it, Redgie: I'm afraid
Anne is not happy: I'm afraid.

REGINALD.

My love,
Is any one unhappy in the world?
I can't just now believe in wretchedness.

MABEL.

But I can. Reggie, do be good—and grave.
I talk to you as if you were grown-up,
You see.

REGINALD.

You do me too much honour.

MABEL.

That
I do, you stupidest of tiresome boys.
Still, you were never ill-natured, were you? Well,
Have you not—boys see nothing—don't you think
You might have seen, had you but eyes, that Annie
Is not—I don't say (that would be absurd)
As happy as we are—no one could be that—
But not—not happy at all?

REGINALD.

My darling, no
What dream is this—what lunacy of love?

MABEL.

Well—I must tell you everything, since—
I wish I did not and I could not think
Her heart or fancy—call it either—were
More fixed on Frank than ever his on me.

REGINALD.

Eh ! Well, why not ? If he can come to love
Any one, after thinking once he loved
You—and you would not have it break his heart
Quite, would you?—what could well befall us all
Happier than this ? You don't suppose he can ?
To me it seems—you know how hard and strange
It seems to hope or fancy : but God grant
It may be ! If old Frank were happy once,
I should not feel I ought not—now and then—
To be so happy always.

MABEL.

But you ought.
How good you are, Redgie !

REGINALD.

O, very good.
I'd like—I want—to see my dearest friends
Happy—without a touch of trouble or pains

For me to take or suffer. Wonderful,
Is it not? saintly—great—heroic?

MABEL.

Well,
I think you may—I think we shall. But don't
Be boyish—don't be prompting Frank: you know,
Reginald, what I mean.

REGINALD.

Yes: that he may—
Will, very likely—want a hand like yours
Rather than mine to help him—bring him through—
Give him a lift or shove.

MABEL.

Leave well alone.
That's all I mean.

REGINALD.

You always did know best,
And always will: I shall be always right
Now that my going or doing or saying depends
On you. It's well you are what you are: you might,
If you were evil-minded, make a man
Run from his post—betray or yield his flag—
Duck down his head and scuttle.

MABEL.

Not a man
Like you.

REGINALD.

Let no man boast himself: does not
The Bible say—something like that?

MABEL.

Perhaps.
But then you don't, and never did, you know—
Not even about this play of yours. Come in:
The windy darkness creeps and leaps by fits
Up westward: clouds, and neither stars nor sun
And just the ghost of a lost moon gone blind
And helpless. If we are to play at all,
I must rehearse my part again to-night. [*Exeunt.*

ACT IV.

SCENE I.—*A stage representing a garden by the sea.*

SONG (*from within*).

Love and Sorrow met in May
Crowned with rue and hawthorn-spray,
And Sorrow smiled.
Scarce a bird of all the spring
Durst between them pass and sing,
And scarce a child.

Love put forth his hand to take
Sorrow's wreath for sorrow's sake,
Her crown of rue.
Sorrow cast before her down
Even for love's sake Love's own crown,
Crowned with dew.

Winter breathed again, and spring
Cowered and shrank with wounded wing
Down out of sight.
May, with all her loves laid low,
Saw no flowers but flowers of snow
That mocked her flight.

Love rose up with crownless head
Smiling down on springtime dead,
On wintry May.
Sorrow, like a cloud that flies,
Like a cloud in clearing skies,
Passed away.

Enter ALVISE.

ALVISE.

This way she went: the nightingales that heard
Fell silent, and the loud-mouthed salt sea-wind
Took honey on his lips from hers, and breathed
The new-born breath of roses. Not a weed
That shivers on the storm-shaped lines of shore
But felt a fragrance in it, and put on
The likeness of a lily.

Enter GALASSO.

GALASSO.

Thou art here.
God will not let thee hide thyself too close
For hate and him to find thee. Draw: the light
Is good enough to die by.

ALVISE.

Thou hast found him
That would have first found thee. Set thou thy sword

To mine, its edge is not so fain to bite
As is my soul to slay thee. [*They draw.*

Enter BEATRICE *and* FRANCESCA.

BEATRICE.

What is this?
What serpent have ye trod on?

ALVISE.

Didst thou bid me
Draw, seeing far off the surety for thy life
That women's tongues should bring thee?

BEATRICE.

Speak not to him.
Speak to me—me, Alvise.

ALVISE.

Sweet, be still.
Galassi, shall I smite thee on the lips
That dare not answer with a lie to mine
And know they cannot, if they speak, but lie?

GALASSO.

Thou knowest I dare not in Beatrice's sight
Strike thee to hell—nor threaten thee.

ALVISE.

I know
Thou liest. She stands between thy grave and thee,
As thou between the sun and hell.

FRANCESCA.

My lord,
Forbear him.

GALASSO.

I am not thy lord; who made me
Master or lord of thine? Not God should say,
Save with his tongue of thunder, and be heard
(If hearing die not in a dead man's ears),
'Forbear him.'

ALVISE.

Nay, Beatrice, bid not me
Forbear: he will not let me bid him live.

GALASSO.

Thou shalt not find a tongue some half-hour hence
To pray with to my sword for time to pray
And die not damned.

FRANCESCA.

Sir, speak not blasphemy.
Death's wings beat round about us day and night:

Their wind is in our faces now. I pray you,
Take heed.

GALASSO.

Of what? of God, or thee? Not I.
But let Beatrice bend to me——

ALVISE.

To thee?
Bend?.. Nay, Beatrice, bind me not in chains,
Who would not play thy traitor: give my sword
What God gives all the waves and birds of the air,
Freedom.

BEATRICE.

He gives it not to slay.

ALVISE.

He shall.
Are the waves bloodless or the vultures bland?
Loose me, love: leave me: let me go.

BEATRICE.

Thou shalt not
Put off for me before my face thy nature,
Thy natural name of man, to mock with murder
The murderous waves and beasts of ravin. Slay me,

And God may give thee leave to slay him: I
Shall know not of it ever.

GALASSO.

Vivarini,
These women's hands that here strike peace between
us
To-morrow shall not stead thee. Live a little:
My sword is not more thirsty than the sea,
Nor less secure in patience. Thou shalt find
A sea-rock for thy shipwreck on dry land here
When thou shalt steer again upon the steel of it
And find its fang's edge mortal. [*Exit.*

ALVISE.

Have ye shamed me?
Mine enemy goes down seaward with no sign
Set of my sword upon him.

BEATRICE.

Let him pass.
To-morrow brings him back from sea—if ever
He come again.

FRANCESCA.

How should not he come back, then?

BEATRICE.

The sea hath shoals and storms.

ALVISE.

God guard him—till
He stand within my sword's reach!

FRANCESCA.

Pray thou rather
God keep thee from the reach of his.

ALVISE.

He cannot,
Except he smite to death or deadly sickness
One of us ere we join. My saint Beatrice,
Thou hast no commission, angel though thou be, sweet,
Given thee of God to guard mine enemy's head
Or cross me as his guardian.

BEATRICE.

Would I cross thee,
The spirit I live by should stand up to chide
The soul-sick will that moved me. Yet I would not,
Had I God's leave in hand to give thee, give
Thy sword and his such leave to cross as might
Pierce through my heart in answer.

ALVISE.

Wouldst thou bid me,
When he comes back to-morrow from the sea
Whereon to-day his ship rides royal, yield
Thee and my sword up to him?

FRANCESCA.

Nay, not her:
Thy sword she might.

ALVISE.

She would not.

BEATRICE.

Fain I would,
And keep thine honour perfect.

ALVISE.

That may be,
When heaven and hell kiss, and the noon puts on
The starry shadow of midnight. Sweet, come in:
The wind grows keener than a flower should face
And fear no touch of trouble. Doubt me not
That I will take all heed for thee and me,
Who am now no less than one least part of thee.

[*Exeunt.*

SCENE II.—*The same.*

Enter BEATRICE *and* FRANCESCA.

BEATRICE.

The wind is sharp as steel, and all the sky
That is not red as molten iron black
As iron long since molten. How the flowers
Cringe down and shudder from the scourge! I would
Galasso's ship were home in harbour.

FRANCESCA.

Here r
What comfort wouldst thou give him?

BEATRICE.

What should I give?
Hadst thou some gentler maiden's mercy in thee,
Thou mightst, though death hung shuddering on his lips
And mixed its froth of anguish with the sea's
Revive him.

FRANCESCA.

I, Beatrice?

BEATRICE.

Who but thou,
Francesca?

FRANCESCA.

Mock not, lest thy scoff turn back
Like some scared snake to sting thee.

BEATRICE.

Nay, not I:
Dost thou not mock me rather, knowing I know
Thou lov'st him as I love not? as I love
Alvise?

FRANCESCA.

There is none I love but God.
Thou knowest he doth not love me.

BEATRICE.

Dost thou dream
His love for me is even as thine for him,
Born of a braver father than is hate,
A fairer mother than is envy? Me
He loves not as he hates my lover: thou
Mayst haply set—as in this garden-ground
Half barren and all bitter from the sea
Some light of lilies shoots the sun's laugh back—

Even in the darkness of his heart and hate
Some happier flower to spring against thy smile
And comfort thee with blossom.

FRANCESCA.

Thou shouldst be not
So fast a friend of mine: we were not born
I a Mariani, a Signorelli thou,
To play, with love and hate at odds with life,
Sisters.

BEATRICE.

I know not in what coign of the heart
The root of hate strikes hellward, nor what rains
Make fat so foul a spiritual soil with life,
Nor what plague-scattering planets feed with fire
Such earth as brings forth poison. What is hate
That thou and I should know it?

FRANCESCA.

I cannot tell
Flowers are there deadlier than all blights of the air
Or hell's own reek to heavenward: springs, whose water
Puts out the pure and very fire of life
As clouds may kill the sunset: sins and sorrows,
Hate winged as love, and love walled round as hate is,

With fear and weaponed wrath and harm-girt anguish,
There have been and there may be. Wouldst thou
    dream now
This flower were mortal poison, or this flasket
Filled full with juice of colder-blooded flowers
And herbs the faint moon feeds with dew, that warily
I bear about me against the noonday's needs,
When the sun ravins and the waters reek
With lustrous fume and feverous light like fire,
Preservative against it?

BEATRICE.

Sure, the flower
Could hurt no babe as bright and soft as it
More than it hurts us now to smell to: nor
Could any draught that heals or harms be found
Preservative against it.

FRANCESCA.

Yet perchance
Preservative this draught of mine might prove
Against the bitterness of life—of noon,
I would say—heat, and heavy thirst, and faintness
That binds with lead the lids of the eyes, and hangs
About the heart like hunger.

BEATRICE.

I'm athirst;
Thy very words have made me: and the noon
Indeed is hot. Let me drink of it.

FRANCESCA.

Drink.

BEATRICE.

The wells are not so heavenly cold. What comfort
Thou hast given me! I shall never thirst again,
I think.

FRANCESCA.

I am sure thou shalt not—till thou wake
Out of the next kind sleep that shall fall on thee
And hold thee fast as love, an hour or twain hence.

BEATRICE.

I thank thee for thy gentle words and promises
More than for this thy draught of healing. Sleep
Is half the seed of life—the seed and stay of it—
And love is all the rest.

FRANCESCA.

Thou art sure of that?
Be sure, then.

BEATRICE.

How should I be less than sure of it?
Alvise's love and thine confirm and comfort
Mine own with like assurance. All the wind's wrath
That darkens now the whitening sea to southward
Shall never blow the flame that feeds the sun out
Nor bind the stars from rising: how should grief, then,
Evil, or envy, change or chance of ruin,
Lay hand on love to mar him? Death, whose tread
Is white as winter's ever on the sea
Whose waters build his charnel, hath no kingdom
Beyond the apparent verge and bourn of life
Whereon to reign or threaten. Love, not he,
Is lord of chance and change: the moons and suns
That measure time and lighten serve him not,
Nor know they if a shadow at all there be
That fear and fools call death, not seeing each year
How thick men's dusty days and crumbling hours
Fall but to rise like stars and bloom like flowers.

[*Exeunt.*

SCENE III.—*The same.*

Enter ALVISE *and* BEATRICE.

ALVISE.

Thou art not well at ease: come in again
And rest: the day grows dark as nightfall, ere
Night fall indeed upon it.

BEATRICE.

No, not yet.
I do not fear the thunder, nor the sea
That mocks and mates the thunder. What I fear
I know not: but I will not go from hence
Till that sea-thwarted ship's crew thwart the sea
Or perish for its pasture. See, she veers,
And sets again straight hither. All good saints,
Whose eyes unseen of ours that here lack light
Hallow the darkness, guard and guide her! Lo,
She reels again, and plunges shoreward: God,
Whose hand with curb immeasurable as they
Bridles and binds the waters, bid the wind
Fall down before thee silent ere it slay,
And death, whose clarion rends the heart of the air,
Be dumb as now thy mercy! O, that cry

Had more than tempest in it: life borne down
And hope struck dead with horror there put forth
Toward heaven that heard not for the clamouring sea
Their last of lamentation.

ALVISE.

Some there are—
Nay, one there is comes shoreward. If mine eyes
Lie not, being baffled of the wind and sea,
The face that flashed upon us out of hell
Between the refluent and the swallowing wave
Was none if not Galassi's. Nay, go in:
Look not upon us.

BEATRICE.

Wherefore?

ALVISE.

Must I not
Save him to slay to-morrow? If I let
The sea's or God's hand slay mine enemy first,
That hand strikes dead mine honour. [*Exit.*

BEATRICE.

Save him, Christ!
God, save him! Death is at my heart: I feel
His breath make darkness round me.

Enter FRANCESCA.

FRANCESCA.

Dost thou live?
Dost thou live yet?

BEATRICE.

I know not. What art thou,
To question me of life and death?

FRANCESCA.

I am not
The thing I was.

BEATRICE.

The friend I loved and knew thee
Thou art not. This fierce night that leaps up eastward,
Laughing with hate and hunger, loud and blind,
Is not less like the sunrise. What strange poison
Has changed thy blood, that face and voice and spirit
(If spirit or sense bid voice or face interpret)
Should change to this that meets me?

FRANCESCA.

Did I drink
The poison that I gave thee? Thou art dead now:
Not the oldest of the world's forgotten dead

Hath less to do than thou with life. Thou shalt not
Set eyes again on one that loved thee: here
No face but death's and mine, who hate thee deadlier
Than life hates death, shalt thou set eyes on. Die,
And dream that God may save thee: from my hands
Alive thou seest he could not.

Re-enter ALVISE *with* GALASSO.

ALVISE.

Stand, I say.
Stand up. Thou hast no hurt upon thee. Stand,
And gather breath to praise God's grace with.

GALASSO.

Thee
First must I thank, who hast plucked me hardly back
Forth of the ravening lips of death. What art thou?
This light is made of darkness.

ALVISE.

Yet the darkness
May serve to see thine enemy by: to-morrow
The sun shall serve us better when we meet
And sword to sword gives thanks for swordstrokes—

GALASSO.

No :
The sun shall never see mine enemy more
Now that his hand has humbled me.

ALVISE.

Forego not
Thy natural right of manhood. Chance it was,
Not I, that chose thee for my hand to save
As haply thine had saved me, had the wind
Flung me as thee to deathward.

GALASSO.

Dost thou think
To live, and say it, and smile at me? Thy saint
Had heavenlier work to do than guard thee, when
God gave thine evil star such power as gave thee
Power on thine enemy's life to save it. Twice
Thou shalt not save or spare me: if to-morrow
Thy sword had borne down mine, thou hadst let me live
And shamed me out of living: now, I am sure,
Thou shalt not twice rebuke me. [*Stabs him.*

BEATRICE.

Death is good:
He gives me back Alvise.

ALVISE.

Was it thou
Or God, Beatrice, speaking out of heaven,
Who turned my death to life?

BEATRICE.

I am dying, Alvise:
I thought to have left—perchance to have lost thee: now
We shall not part for ever. [*Dies.* ALVISE *dies.*

FRANCESCA.

Wilt thou stand
Star-struck to death, Galasso? Let our dead
Lie dead, while we fly fleet as birds or winds
Forth of the shadow of death, and laugh, and live
As happy as these were hapless.

GALASSO.

She—is she
Dead? Hath she kissed the death upon his lips
And fed it full from hers?

FRANCESCA.

Why, dost thou dream
I did not kill her?

GALASSO.

Not a devil in hell
But one cast forth on earth could do it: and she
Shall shame the light of heaven no longer.

[*Stabs her.*

FRANCESCA.

Fool,
Thou hast set me free from fate and fear: I knew
Thou wouldst not love me. [*Dies.*

GALASSO.

What am I, to live
And see this death about me? Death and life
Cast out so vile a thing from sight of heaven.
Save where the darkness of the grave is deep,
I cannot think to wake on earth or sleep.

ACT V.

SCENE I.—*An ante-chamber to the drawing-room.*

Enter ANNE.

ANNE.

To bear my death about me till I die
And always put the time off, tremblingly,
As if I loved to live thus, would be worse
Than death and meaner than the sin to die.
The sin to kill myself—or think of it—
I have sinned that sin already. Not a day
That brings the day I cannot live to see,
Nearer, but burns my heart like flame and makes
My thoughts within me serpents fanged with fire.
He would not weep if I were dead, and she
Would. If I make no better haste to die,
I shall go mad and tell him—pray to him,
If not for love, for mercy on me—cry
'Look at me once—not as you look at her,
But not as every day you look at me—

And see who loves you, Reginald.' Ah God,
That one should yearn at heart to do or say
What if it ever could be said or done
Would strike one dead with shame!

MABEL (*singing in the next room*).

There's nae lark loves the lift, my dear,
  There's nae ship loves the sea,
There's nae bee loves the heather-bells,
  That loves as I love thee, my love,
  That loves as I love thee.

The whin shines fair upon the fell,
  The blithe broom on the lea:
The muirside wind is merry at heart:
  It's a' for love of thee, my love
  It's a' for love of thee.

ANNE.

For love of death,
For love of death it is that all things live
And all joys bring forth sorrows. Sorrow and death
Have need of life and love to prey upon
Lest they too die as those do. What am I
That I should live? A thousand times it seems
I have drawn this flasket out to look on it
And dream of dying, since first I seized it—stole,
And Arthur never missed it. Yet again

The thought strikes back and stabs me, what are they,
What are they all, that they should live, and I
Die? Arthur told me surely, that this death
Was pangless—swift and soft as when betimes
We sink away to sleep. If sin it is,
I will die praying for pardon: God must see
I am no more fit to live than is a bird
Wounded to death.

Enter SIR FRANCIS, SIR ARTHUR, *and* FRANK.

SIR FRANCIS.

Well, Anne, and could you rest
Well after murdering Mabel? Here is Frank
Declares his crimes would hardly let him sleep:
While he who made you criminals appears
Shamelessly happy.

FRANK.

Reggie always was
Hardened: the plays he used to improvise
At school were deep in bloodshed.

SIR ARTHUR.

Let us trust
That happiness and age may make his Muse
Milder.

ANNE.

I am sure, I hope so. It was hard
To find yourself so wicked.

SIR FRANCIS.

Hard on you,
Certainly. Were you tired?

ANNE.

Why? Do I look
Tired?

SIR FRANCIS.

Well, not tired exactly; still, your eyes
Look hot and dull.

ANNE.

All eyes cannot be bright
Always, like Reginald's and Mabel's.

SIR ARTHUR.

Ah,
It does one good to see them. Since the world
Began, or love began it, never was
A brighter pair of lovers. What a life
Will theirs be, if the morning of it mean

Really the thing it seems to say, and noon
Keep half the promise of it!

FRANK.

That it should,
If they get only their deserts: they are,
He the best fellow, she the best girl born.

SIR FRANCIS.

You're not a bad friend, Frank, I will say.

ANNE.

No.
He is not

SIR FRANCIS.

What your father would have said
To my approval of the match, perhaps
It's best not guessing: but the harshest brute
That ever made his broken-hearted ward
The subject or the heroine of a tale
Must, I think, have relented here.

SIR ARTHUR.

But still
We are none the less your debtors—Redgie and I
It lays on me an obligation too,
Your generous goodness to him.

SIR FRANCIS.

No, none at all.
I would not let the youngster tell me so.

Enter REGINALD *and* MABEL.

So, you can look us in the face, my boy,
And not be, as you should, ashamed to see
How much less happy are other folk than you?
Your face is like the morning.

REGINALD.

Does it blush?
You'd see I was ashamed then.

MABEL.

What, of me,
Redgie? It's rather soon to say so. Still,
It's not too late—happily.

SIR FRANCIS.

Nothing can
Happen that does not fall out happily,
It seems, for you—and nothing should, I think,
Ever. Come with me, Frank. I want you.

FRANK.

Why?

SIR FRANCIS.

I never thought you quite so dull till now.
Come. [*Exeunt* SIR FRANCIS *and* FRANK.

SIR ARTHUR.

Take me with you: I'm superfluous too.
[*Exit.*

MABEL.

Don't you go, Anne.

ANNE.

I will not if you wish.

MABEL.

I do, and so does Redgie. We have seen
These last few days as little of you, you know,
As if you had been—well, anywhere.

ANNE.

Except,
Remember, at rehearsals; and last night
We came against each other on the stage.

MABEL.

Indeed we did. Is that a property
You have kept about you?

ANNE.

What? where? this—ah no,
A—something for a touch of cold I caught
Last night—I think at least it was last night.
Arthur prescribed it for me.

MABEL.

Let me taste.
I am hoarse—I am sure I must be hoarse to-day
With rattling out all Redgie's rant—much more
Than you did.

ANNE.

No: you do not want it.

MABEL.

Anne!

ANNE.

You cannot want it, Mabel.

MABEL.

How can you
Know? Don't be positive—and selfish.

ANNE.

There—
Take it. No—do not taste it, Mabel.

MABEL.

Look,
Redgie, how strange a pretty colour! Why,
One wants a name to praise it—and it smells
Like miles on miles of almond-blossom, all
Condensed in one full flower. If this had been
The poison Anne and you prepared for me,
I really would have taken it last night
And not pretended, as I did, to sip,
And kept my lips dry. [*Drinks.*

REGINALD.

Does the flavour match
The colour?

MABEL.

It's a sweet strange taste. Don't you
Try: you won't like it

REGINALD.

Let me know, at least.
[*Drinks.*

ANNE.

You do not yet: or do you now know?

MABEL.

Anne!
What have we done—and you? What is it?

ANNE.

Death,
Mabel. You see, you would not let me die
And leave you living.

MABEL.

Death? She is mad—she is mad
Reginald, help us—her and me—but her
First.

REGINALD.

I can hardly help myself to stand.
Sit you down by me.

ANNE.

Can the sun still shine?
I did not mean to murder you.

MABEL.

And yet
We are dying, are we not—dying?

ANNE.

I meant

To die, and never sin again or see
How happy past all dreams of happiness
You, whom he loved, and he, who loved you, were.

Re-enter SIR FRANCIS, SIR ARTHUR, *and* FRANK.

SIR FRANCIS.

We are here again, you see, already. Why,
What strange new tragic play is this you are all
Rehearsing?

ANNE.

Mabel, if you can forgive,
Say so. I may remember that in hell.

MABEL.

I do. And so does Redgie. But you might
Have spared or saved him.

ANNE.

How, and let you die?

REGINALD.

Ah, how? She did not mean it.

ANNE.

And do you
Forgive me?

REGINALD.

Surely. I am one with her,
And she forgives.

SIR ARTHUR.

They are dying indeed. And she
Has killed them.

REGINALD.

No. She did not mean.

MABEL.

Indeed,
She did not.

SIR FRANCIS.

God in heaven! What dream is this?

ANNE.

God help me! But God will not. I must die
Alone, if they forgive me. I must die. [*Exit.*

REGINALD.

It was a terrible accident, you see—
Was it not, Mabel? That is all we know.

MABEL.

All.

FRANK.

Redgie, will you speak to me?

REGINALD.

Good night,
Frank—dear old Frank—my brother and hers. And you,
Good night, dear Arthur. Think we are going to see
Our mother, Mabel—Frank's and ours.

MABEL.

I will.
But, Reginald, how hard it is to go!

REGINALD.

We have been so happy, darling, let us die
Thinking of that, and thanking God.

MABEL.

I will.

Kiss me. Ah, Reginald . . . [*Dies.*

REGINALD.

Mabel! I am here. [*Dies.*

SIR ARTHUR.

They could have lived no happier than they die.

THE END.

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